



[Paulo Freire, 1921 - 1997](#)

## **People's Education for People's Power**

Our method is to take a text, and discuss it. This method is modelled on the theory and practice of the late Paulo Freire. It is appropriate, then, to begin our course on Education itself, with Freire.

In the first place, Freire can assist us greatly in defining what we are pursuing in this course on Education. We are looking for a pedagogical theory: a theory of teaching and learning. What is it for? What is education for? What is educational theory for? Paulo Freire, a Brazilian, is an example of one who explored such questions, and he did so within a liberation-struggle context, akin to our own South African struggle.

In the first sentence of Paulo Freire's "[Pedagogy of The Oppressed](#)" (attached, please find Chapter 1, or use the link below) Freire "problematizes" what he calls "humanisation". That sentence says:

*"While the problem of humanization has always, from an axiological point of view, been humankind's central problem, it now takes on the character of an inescapable concern."*

Axiology is the philosophical study of value. Freire declares his principle value. It is humanisation. It corresponds directly to the South African concept of "ubuntu".

*"But while both humanization and dehumanization are real alternatives, only the first is the people's vocation,"* says Freire, asserting this political and moral principle as a starting point.

In doing so, Freire stands side-by-side with Karl Marx, who, in his masterpiece "Capital", and all his life, wanted to restore humanity to itself.

This is what education is for.

Let us look at some more of Marx's, and Freire's words.

In his 1844 [Introduction to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right](#), at the gestation, if not quite the birth of "Marxism", Marx, referring to religion, wrote:

*“Criticism has plucked the imaginary flowers on the chain not in order that man shall continue to bear that chain without fantasy or consolation, but so that he shall throw off the chain and pluck the living flower.”*

Above all, Marx wanted humans to be human. Criticism was not to crush, but to set humans free.

Similarly, Freire’s educational method is called “critical pedagogy”. It rests on the fundamental question of philosophy: the relation of mind to matter (Subject to Object). It asks to be judged according to that principle. So on page 3 of Chapter One of the “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”, Freire writes:

*“... one cannot conceive of objectivity without subjectivity. Neither can exist without the other, nor can they be dichotomized. The separation of objectivity from subjectivity, the denial of the latter when analyzing reality or acting upon it, is objectivism. On the other hand, the denial of objectivity in analysis or action, resulting in a subjectivism which leads to solipsistic positions, denies action itself by denying objective reality. Neither objectivism nor subjectivism, nor yet psychologism is propounded here, but rather subjectivity and objectivity in constant dialectical relationship.”*

Explicitly embracing his connection with Marx, Freire continues:

*“To deny the importance of subjectivity in the process of transforming the world and history is naive and simplistic. It is to admit the impossible: a world without people. This objectivistic position is as ingenuous as that of subjectivism, which postulates people without a world. World and human beings do not exist apart from each other, they exist in constant interaction. Man does not espouse such a dichotomy; nor does any other critical, realistic thinker. What Marx criticized and scientifically destroyed was not subjectivity, but subjectivism and psychologism.”*

The significance of the human Subject in Freire’s theoretical scheme is clear. Education as the refreshment and renewal of humanity is declared by these words from the last paragraph of his Chapter 1:

*“Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators.”*

The Communists, in their own minds and in their intentions, seek to educate, organise and mobilise, not so as to command the working class and the general masses, but help to set them free.

The problem of how to do so is exactly the problem that Freire addresses in “The Pedagogy of the Oppressed.” It requires the formulation quoted above: “World and human beings do not exist apart from each other, they exist in constant interaction.”

Freire writes about leadership and people both being human Subjects, “co-intent on reality”. This is what gives meaning both to education, and to politics. Leadership (teacher) and masses (learners) are “co-intent on reality”, coping together with the open reality of human life within an objective material universe.

We are talking here of revolutionary pedagogy. We are talking here of teaching with a purpose and a reason that anyone can understand, i.e. we are teaching with “intentionality” that students can understand and potentially share as equals.

We are talking of liberation. In South Africa this concept is called **“people’s education for people’s power”**.

In the next chapter we will dwell upon the dreadful mistakes that can be made if we fall into the errors of what Freire calls “the banking theory of education”.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Pedagogy of The Oppressed, Chapter 1, 1970, Freire.](#)
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